

News Release

U.S. Senators Pete Domenici & Jeff Bingaman

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BACA RANCH PRESERVED FOR GENERATIONS OF AMERICANS

Bill Authorizing Purchase Signed By President

WASHINGTON -- A slice of mountain Shangri-la will be preserved for generations of Americans, said Senators Pete Domenici and Jeff Bingaman, as President Clinton today put pen to paper and codified the federal government's purchase of the Baca Ranch.

The president today signed into law the **Valles Caldera National Preservation & Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act** (S.1892), which authorizes federal purchase of the 95,000-acre Baca Ranch and establishes important land management reforms.

With the \$101 million needed to buy the property already approved by Congress, the U.S. Forest Service is now free to complete the purchase of the ranch and begin development of the innovative board of trustees that will management the property.

"With the stroke of a pen, the future enjoyment of the Baca Ranch has been preserved for Americans for generations to come. For many New Mexicans, this magnificent property is considered a rare slice of paradise, but has been as inaccessible as the Garden of Eden" Domenici said. "Now, this unequaled jewel can be preserved and utilized as a national treasure. At the same time, I look forward to the surplus and inholdings land management reforms that have also been enacted today."

"It took over forty years, but New Mexico and the nation now have a rare treasure," Bingaman said. "Because of the beauty, the expanse, and the distinction of the property, its value can never fully be measured. The Baca will undoubtedly come to be known as the Yellowstone of the Southwest. Clinton Anderson is smiling today."

S.1892, developed in cooperation with the White House, was introduced in November by Domenici and Bingaman and passed the Senate in May. Representatives Heather Wilson and Tom Udall introduced an identical bill, HR 3288, in the House of Representatives.

Congress last year set aside \$101 million for the purchase of the ranch. Last week, the Senate approved a Domenici amendment to provide \$990,000 in the FY2001 Interior Appropriations Bill to cover necessary expenses for implementing S.1892. The funding would be available to the Agriculture Secretary for the management of the Baca Ranch until a Valles Caldera board of trustees assumes the role.

In addition to authorizing the Baca Ranch purchase, the law also establishes a new federal land management policy dealing with federal lands designated for disposal and so-called "inholdings."

The new law directs the Interior Department to fulfill all legal requirements for the sale or transfer of as many as six million acres of land already identified by Bureau of Land Management as disposal property under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. It authorizes the use of the proceeds generated from these lands to purchase inholdings from willing sellers. The Interior Department would establish a priority for the acquisition, on a willing seller basis, in order of those which have existed as inholdings for the longest time.

